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ABSTRACT

In the United Kingdom, exclusion from school is the most serious sanction a school can use in response to disruptive behavior. There has been continuing concern about the rising numbers of exclusions in the United Kingdom as a whole; however, little has been known about the situation in Scotland. This report presents findings of a study that investigated student exclusions in Scotland. The research sought to map Regional Authority policies, describe the characteristics of a sample of excluded pupils, investigate perceptions of exclusion and of in-school alternatives, and provide guidance on best policy and practice. During 1994-96, data were gathered through analysis of Regional Authority policy documents, telephone interviews with senior education officers, a telephone survey of 176 headteachers, and case studies of 8 secondary and 4 primary schools. Findings indicated that excluded pupils were treated differently in different parts of the country. Headteachers did not view exclusion as an effective sanction, and mentioned a variety of inschool alternatives. Some pupils felt that they were unfairly treated, being singled out as troublemakers because of gender, socioeconomic status, or family background. Good home-school relations are vital. Recommendations are offered for central government, local authorities, and schools. There was a consensus on the need for national guidance setting out generally agreed and accepted educational principles against which exclusion policy and practice could be judged. Two tables are included. (LMI)

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INTERCHANGE

No 47

Exclusions and In-school Alternatives

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Exclusions and In-school Alternatives

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There has been continuing concern about the rising numbers of exclusions in the UK as a whole. Studies in England have highlighted, for example, the increasing numbers of primary and secondary school children being permanently excluded and the disproportionate numbers of children and young people from ethnic minorities being excluded. Little was known about the situation in Scotland.

This research had five main aims: to map Regional Authority policies; to explore headteachers' perception of these policies; to describe the characteristics of a sample of excluded pupils; to investigate perceptions of exclusion and of in-school alternatives; and to provide guidance on best policy and practice.

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Background

Exclusion from school is the most serious sanction a school can use in response to disruptive behaviour. Schooling is denied the excluded pupils for a specified time and readmittance may be made conditional on the pupil and/or the parent(s) undertaking to change their behaviour. In the most serious cases, exclusion can be permanent and alternative arrangements have to be made. These include transfer to another mainstream school, transfer to a special school or home tuition.

In Scotland, there are two main grounds for exclusion laid down in the Schools General (Scotland) Regulations 1975 as amended. These are:

- that the education authority are of the opinion that the parent of the pupil refuses or fails to comply or to allow the pupil to comply with the rules, regulations or disciplinary requirements of the school;
- that they consider that in all the circumstances to allow the pupil to continue his/her attendance at the school would be likely to be seriously detrimental to order and discipline in the school or to the educational well-being of pupils there.

The procedures for exclusion are set out in a range of regulations and acts. Key features are:

- the need for oral/written communication between the school/authority and the home on the day of the decision to exclude and subsequently, in the event of the exclusion not being resolved within 7 days;
- the right of appeal against exclusion to an appeal committee and beyond that to the sheriff;
- the recording of information about exclusion in the pupil's progress record;
- the responsibility which the parents have to educate the excluded pupil;
- the registering of exclusion as unauthorised absence as the pupil is deemed to be absent from school without reasonable excuse.

The research

The research was carried out in three main phases 1994–96. Phase 1 on Regional Authority policy involved an analysis of appropriate documents and a telephone interview with a senior education officer with responsibility for exclusion.

Phase 2 consisted of a telephone survey of 176 headteachers, 60 from primary schools and 116 from secondary schools. We also asked headteachers to supply us with details of pupils who had been excluded since August 1995. Some 120 of the 176 did so, providing us with detailed information on 2,710 pupils.

Phase 3 consisted of case studies of eight secondary and four primary schools. Each pair of schools was similar in size and in the socio-economic status of their pupils, but different in their use of exclusion.

Education authority policy

Excluded pupils were treated differently in different parts of the country.

Is consistency across Scotland important?

The research was carried out while the 12 Regional and Island Authorities were still in existence and before the reform of local government created 32 single tier councils. Many of the new councils are in process of adapting the exclusions policies of their Regional predecessors. The research revealed a wide diversity of policy, a diversity likely to increase with 32 rather than 12 authorities. The main areas of diversity were:

- informal exclusion, where pupils were sent home for a 'cooling off' period without any record of such an event being kept. Four authorities permitted this at the time of the research either explicitly or implicitly; three expressly forbade it and five made no mention of it in policy documents.
- permanent exclusion, where the pupil could not be readmitted to the original school. This was a feature of policy in three authorities.
- notification of exclusion to the authority. Five authorities wanted notification of all exclusions while seven required notification only of exclusions of a certain number of days or beyond.
- stages of exclusion. These included 'at the headteacher's discretion'; two types such as 'under 14 days' and '14 days and over'; 3 stages of varying lengths, eg 5/10/15 days, 5/15/30 days.
- volume and, by implication, status of policy. Some authorities had fairly voluminous documentation and referred to other policies such as those for special educational needs. Others deliberately eschewed a formal policy statement, relying instead on a standard letter to headteachers.
- policy aims – all authorities stressed that exclusion was a serious step and should be used as a last resort. However, ten authorities emphasised the overall aim of inclusion, sustaining pupils in mainstream schools; two emphasised the need for accurate record keeping and adherence to the authority's procedures with an eye on legal process.
- status of an excluded child pending an appeal. In some authorities the pupil remained excluded when an appeal was lodged even if the appeal took place at a time after the pupil could have been readmitted.

The main areas of similarity among most, but not all authorities, were:

- the lack of a systematic collation and analysis of exclusion statistics and hence of a strategic overview in terms of schools, or of pupil characteristics such as age, gender, ethnic origin, special needs or whether the case was referable to the Children's Panel.

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- the lack of a strategic overview of the range, quality and cost of alternative, off-site provision, regularly monitored, up-dated and debated.
- the ad hoc provision of staff development in the area of pupils with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties.

Headteachers' views

Headteachers did not see exclusion as an effective sanction.

What purpose does exclusion serve?

Headteachers saw exclusion as a last resort. They used exclusion to protect other pupils and to provide a respite for staff. Exclusion was not necessarily seen as an effective way of meeting the needs of pupils seen as disruptive. However, in discussing education authority policy, many headteachers were unable to distinguish policy goals from procedures governing exclusion. This implies that headteachers tended to take a pragmatic rather than principled stance on the use of exclusion.

There was general acceptance of the main features of education authority policy, although primary headteachers felt that policy and procedures were oriented to secondary and inadequate for primary. There was a general complaint that resources were lacking and one primary headteacher candidly stated:

> *We shouldn't have to use exclusion to get resources for children who need them - but in fact we do.*

While there was a general commitment to maintain pupils in mainstream schools, the resources to enable this to happen were generally seen to be lacking.

In-school alternatives

A variety of in-school alternatives to exclusion were mentioned.

What alternatives are used in your school? How effective are they?

Headteachers and others reported 20 strategies they used to avoid exclusion. The use of in-school alternatives was also a focus of the case-studies. Key points from these data are:

- There is no 'quick fix' which can be used instead of exclusion. However, the work undertaken to create an inclusive school may result in a positive school experience for all pupils and hence reduce the use of exclusion.
- Alternatives can be thought of in two ways – alternative punitive sanctions seen as less severe than exclusion, or pro-active supportive measures designed to avoid the need for the use of exclusion as a sanction.
- Some alternative sanctions such as exclusion from class to be supervised by another teacher, part-time attendance, or informal sending home shared many of the negative consequences of exclusion, such as loss of education, difficulties of reintegration and catching up on missed work. Much depended on the degree to which these kind of alternatives were applied. In one extreme case a primary school child was excluded from Drama, PE and Art and spent a large part of each day sitting in the corridor.
- Pro-active supportive measures perceived as effective began in the class-room. These included advance planning and preparation by the teacher, differentiated and flexible curricula and using classroom seating arrangements to separate some pupils as well as specific methods such as circle time and the conscious use of praise and rewards.

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A commitment to teach all children is important.

Do all staff have this commitment?

- Whole school supportive measures included promoting a positive ethos of high expectations of pupils' behaviour and achievement, integrating behaviour and learning support systems, positive relationships between staff and pupils and positive working relationships between teachers and other professionals.
- A key factor underlying all alternative measures is the professional ideology of staff, particularly, though not exclusively, staff in senior positions. If staff hold a professional commitment to an inclusive school, then exclusions are likely to be rare. This means perceiving it to be the job of the teachers to teach all pupils, not just the well-behaved, those who want to learn or high achievers. Senior staff can lead by example. As one headteacher put it:

  I think it's a moral thing ... that those youngsters should be in education and it's education for all. It's not just education for the few that come in and don't cause us any problems.

Of course, it is much easier to set out alternative strategies and to highlight the importance of a positive ethos than to put them into practice in the context of competition for declining resources, heavy workloads on all professionals and the day-to-day demands of teaching. Yet the case studies provided examples of real pupils where successful interventions had taken place. Such successes do not happen by chance but require sustained effort over time from all involved.

Excluded pupils and their parents

Monitoring provides evidence about patterns of exclusion and can help practice.

What use is made of the information about exclusion you collect?

From the survey of 116 secondary schools and 60 primary schools, information on pupils excluded over eight months was obtained. It is important to repeat that the statistics collected are not generalisable but provide a snapshot of exclusions at a particular period in time.

Over this period, August 94 – March 1995, 202 pupils had been excluded from 39 primary schools and 3,562 pupils had been excluded from 110 secondary schools. A further 969 pupils had been sent home. Exclusion most commonly happened only once and for three days or less for most pupils, although a significant proportion had been excluded for longer. About 20 pupils were recorded as a single but long term exclusion. Table 1 shows the number of times pupils had been excluded.*

Table 1: Number of times each pupil had been excluded since August

Times excluded	Primary school pupils N = 184		Secondary school pupils N = 2,435	
	No. of pupils	%	No. of pupils	%
Once	117	64	1,699	69
Twice	34	18	455	18
3 times	15	8	191	8
4 times	14	8	68	3
5 times	2	1	37	1
Over 5 times	2	1	30	1

*Details on some pupils were missing and so totals in the tables may vary.

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Table 2 shows the number of schools days lost through exclusion.

Table 2: Days lost through exclusion per pupil, since August

Number of days excluded	Primary school pupils N = 182		Secondary school pupils N = 2,491	
	No. of pupils	%	No. of pupils	%
One day	13	7	108	4
2 days	29	16	202	8
3 days	50	27	613	25
4 days	10	5	205	8
5 days/a week	23	13	295	12
6 days to 2 weeks	26	14	526	21
11 days to 3 weeks	12	6	183	7
16 days to 6 weeks	14	8	218	9
More than 6 weeks	5	3	141	6

Key characteristics of excluded pupils are:

- more boys than girls were excluded (9:1 in primary and 4:1 in secondary).
- the peak stages for exclusion were P5, S3 and S4.
- over half the excluded secondary pupils had a previous history of indiscipline, while almost all excluded primary pupils had such a history.
- the most common reasons for exclusion were fighting/assault, disruptive behaviour, failure to obey rules and abuse/insolence.
- 26 pupils (19 secondary and 7 primary) had been excluded for assault on staff. Almost all were boys.

Most excluded pupils were readmitted to their original schools. In interviews with a small number of excluded pupils and their parents, it was clear that most pupils and parents valued school and their parents were keen for their children to 'do well'. Almost all pupils, however, cited incidents which they saw as unfair or an over-reaction.

> *'I was talking to somebody and he was annoying me and I swore at him and the teacher heard me. I got suspended for that but I don't really think it was very fair because I didn't, like, shout it out ... people get caught swearing every day in school and sometimes they don't even get a punishment exercise. The teacher just blew up in my face...'*
>
> *Wayne T*

Pupils can feel unfairly treated.

How consistent is your school's reaction to disruptive behaviour and how do you know?

Pupils were conscious that they got labelled as troublemakers and as a consequence got picked on. Pupils who came from the 'wrong part of town' perceived teachers as more likely to pick on them for that reason. These perceptions of unfairness, of being picked on because of family history, neighbourhood or gender give pause for thought. It is easy to dismiss such perceptions on the grounds that 'pupils would say that wouldn't they'. Yet sufficient is known about the labelling of pupils as disruptive or well-behaved, slow or bright, 'chancer' or conscientious and about the consequences of labels for pupils' achievements, for such remarks from pupils not to be dismissed out of hand.

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Pupils reported two different effects of exclusion. On the one hand it was a shock and it brought home the need to improve. Typical remarks were '[I am] trying to keep my nose clean' or '[I need to] control my temper' but pupils attributed this to growing maturity and to pressure from parents as well as exclusion. On the other hand, some pupils were more passive or less willing to change. A typical view was 'it doesn't make any difference to me'. For two pupils interviewed, the apparent effect was to start truanting. This highlights the importance of trying to understand the reasons for bad behaviour and so develop appropriate strategies to deal with it. If learning difficulties are a cause, then exclusion only makes pupils fall further behind in their work and provides little incentive to try harder. Robbie provides this perspective:

> *'You have to catch up, you have to take other people's jotters, the teacher gives you them and you have to copy it all out. ...When you're writing it all out, you always try to be quick about it and the teacher's talking about something else and it's just annoying trying to do the two things.*
>
> *Robbie M*

Good home-school relations are vital.

How is your school promoting this?

All pupils interviewed said that exclusion had made their parents angry. One youngster was so concerned about this he asked us not to interview his mother as it would only upset her to go over past events. We were given examples of strenuous efforts by both home and school to encourage more positive behaviour. We were also given examples of situations where parents or staff felt they had been let down or felt betrayed by some statement or apparent non-co-operation on the part of the other. Good communication is clearly vital, as is the build up of mutual trust. This is summed up below.

> *'I was totally against them [school] but as time goes on, I realised it's not really their fault and you've got to try and work together and that's what we have done. You're trying to stick up for your children, but we do work well together now. I think that's why Mrs Y puts up with what she does from Matthew (P4) because we've given each other support throughout it all. Otherwise I think he would have been out of the school a long time ago.'*
>
> *Mrs P*

Key messages from the research

The research has provided a range of perspectives on exclusion. These have come from local authority officials, headteachers and other staff in primary and secondary schools, social workers and educational psychologists, excluded pupils and their parents. It has also provided a range of statistical information. From these diverse sources a number of key messages about exclusion stand out. These are:

1 For central government

- There is a readiness among schools, education departments, social work departments and others to co-operate in developing guidelines.
- There should be a regular monitoring system for exclusions which includes more information than the total number of exclusions so that there is a strategic overview of exclusion at a national level.

- There is a dearth of information on provision for young people who are repeatedly or permanently excluded and thus a lack of a strategic national overview of such provision and its quality.
- There is a need for information for parents which both clearly states their responsibilities (to provide education for their child and if this is provided through school to ensure attendance and obedience to school rules) and their right to appeal against exclusion.

2 For local authorities

- There needs to be better monitoring of exclusion and a regular analysis of patterns and variation in exclusion rates among primary, secondary and special schools.
- The range of specialist 'off-site' provision maintained or to which access is bought, and the criteria used for deciding on placements, should be regularly reviewed.
- Related to the above, is the question of having available a continuum of provision to meet a continuum of needs. Where more children are being maintained in mainstream, resource allocation should presumably reflect this.
- Greater attention should be paid to the needs of primary schools in formulating inclusion and exclusion policy and procedures.
- There is a need for planned and coherent staff development in promoting positive educational experience. One way of developing staff is through recruiting teachers to school review teams so that a range of staff can see the ways in which schools other than their own operate. These staff can then become an important resource for the authority in promoting good practice. Another way is through encouragement of advanced certificate and diploma work in this area.

3 For schools

- The ethos of the school should be under review to ensure the values espoused on paper are the same as the values in action. The case study work showed that key staff members' perceptions about the role and remit of teachers and schools had a profound influence on exclusion rates.
- It is important that young people are offered an educational experience which they value and which therefore makes exclusion an effective sanction rather than a holiday. This in itself would also have the effect of reducing the need to resort to exclusion. This implies that schools have in place a good system of monitoring and promoting the educational progress of their pupils.
- The educational experience of the pupils in danger of exclusion needs to be considered. This implies that learning/behaviour support and guidance staff are actively involved in decision making about exclusion and about appropriate responses to misbehaviour before exclusion is considered.
- Inter-agency work is vital, as is the recognition that professionals start from different value positions and have different roles and responsibilities.

- There is a need to collate school data on exclusion and to use it to evaluate and review school policy and practice. For instance, there is a need for schools to question the fact that boys, particularly those in S3 and S4, are excluded with much greater frequency than girls, as are pupils from disadvantaged social and economic backgrounds and those from minority cultures relative to the school's overall population.
- It is important to find ways of working with parents to try to prevent problems arising and to solve them when they occur.

The need for national guidelines

There was a consensus on the need for national guidance.

What purposes would national guidance serve?

In feeding back these results to representatives of the new authorities in a series of consultation exercises across Scotland, there was a general consensus that such a wide diversity of practice was undesirable. There was support for national guidance, setting out generally agreed and accepted educational principles against which exclusion policy and practice could be judged. Thus there would be variation across Scotland in that children would have different needs, or indeed, the same needs could be met in different ways in different parts of the country. The aim of guidelines would be to articulate the agreed principles and so promote consistency rather than complete uniformity across Scotland. Key features of guidance would be:

- a preamble stating that an overall aim of Scottish education is inclusion rather than exclusion. This principle is a logical extension of national initiatives on school ethos and on promoting positive behaviour.
- a highlighting of elements and examples of good practice:
  - the value of preventative programmes of positive discipline;
  - the benefits of early intervention;
  - the inclusion of all pupils as an explicit aim fostered by compatible systems of support and discipline and focused on an appropriately differentiated curriculum;
  - the use of a range of alternatives to exclusion;
  - the importance of inter-agency collaboration in solving the school-based problems of disaffected pupils;
  - the need to develop reintegration programmes for excluded pupils.
- a clarification of the legal position regarding informal exclusion and other matters.
- a clarification of the purposes of exclusion.
- the provision of examples of good practice at authority and school level.
- the encouragement of school self evaluation and audit.
- the encouragement of local authority monitoring of exclusion using a common set of criteria and procedures.

Related publications

The following reports on this study are available from The Publications Unit, Moray House Institute of Education, Holyrood Road, Edinburgh EH8 8AQ.

Education Authority Policy and Procedures (38pp) £5.

Alternative Education Provision for Excluded Pupils (72pp) £8.

The Headteachers' Perspective (95pp) £10.

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